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A Letter from a Gentleman in the Country, to his Friends in London, upon the Subject of the Penal Laws and Tests.

Quod tibi non vis fieri, alteri non feceris.

Gentlemen,

I Wonder mightily at the News you send me, that so many of the Town are averse to the Repeal of the Penal Statutes; surely you mean the Clergy of the present Church, and those that are Zealous for their Dignity and Power: For what part of the Kingdom has felt the smart of them more, and at all times, and on all occasions represented their mischief to the Trade, Peace, Plenty, and Wealth of the Kingdom, so freely as the Town has always done? But you unfold the Riddle to me, when you tell me, 'Tis for fear of Popery, tho' I own to you, I cannot comprehend it, any more than you do Transubstantiation: For that we should be afraid of Popery for the sake of Liberty, and then afraid of it because of Persecution, seems to me absurd, as it is, that Liberty should be thought the high way to Persecution. But because they are upon their fears, pray let me tell you mine, and take them among the rest in good part.

If the Romanists seek ease by Law, 'tis an Argument to me they desire to turn good Countrymen, and take the Law for their Security, with the rest of their Neighbours; and a greater Complement they cannot put upon our English Constitution, nor give a better pledge of their desires to be at peace with us. But if we are so Tenacious, as we will keep on foot the greatest blemish of our Reformation, viz. our Hanging, Quartering, Plunder, Banishing Laws; is it not turning them out of this quiet course, and telling them, if they will have ease, they must get it as they can, for we will never concede it? And pray tell me, if this be not thrusting them upon the methods we fear they will take, at the same time that we give that, for the reason why we do so.

If Law can secure us, which is the plea that is made, we may doubtless find an expedient in that which may repeal these, if the danger be not of Liberty itself, but of our losing it by them at last; for there is no mischief the wit of man can invent, that the wit of man cannot avoid. But that which I confess makes me melancholy, is, that methinks we never made more haste to be couzened; no not in the business of the Declaration of Indulgence, when in the name of Property that was actually damn'd, which, at least, reprieved it; and the price the Church of England gave for it, viz. her promise of a legal case, actually failed us: For instead of saving our selves from Popery, we are by these partialities provoking it every day, and methinks, foolishly for our own safety; because there can be no other end in doing so, then securing that Party which calls it self the Church of England, that is in her Constitution none of the best Friends to Property; for mens Liberties and Estates are by her Laws made forfeitable for Non-conformity to Her: And I Challenge

the Records of all time since Popery got the Chair in England, to produce an eight part of the Laws to ruin men for Conscience, that have been made since the other has been the national Religion, which is, I say, a scandal to the Reformation.

She says, she is afraid of Popery, because of its Violence, and yet uses Force to compel it; *Is not this resisting Popery with Popery?* which we call loving the Treason, but hating the Traytor: She would have Power to Force or Destroy others, but they should not have Power to Force or Destroy her, no not to save themselves: Shift the hand never so often, this Weapon is still the same. 'Twere happy therefore that all Parties were disarm'd of this Sword, and that it were put where it ought only to be, in the Civil Magistrates hand, to terrifie Evil Doers, and cherish those that do well, remembering St Peter's saying (in Cornelius's case) for an Example, *I perceive now of a truth that God is no respecter of Persons, but those that fear him, and work Righteousness in all Nations shall be accepted.* Else what security does the Church of England give to the great body of her Dissenters, that she will not do what she fears from Popery, when she has a Prince of her own Religion upon the Throne, that has made so fair a Progress these last six and twenty Years in ruining Families, for non-conformity under Princes of an other Perswasion. Come, Interest will not lye, she fears Liberty, as much as Popery: Since those that want, and plead for the one, are an hundred times more in number then the Friends of the other, and all of her side, that Popery should not mount the Chair: So that she would get more then she would lose by the Repeal, if an equal desire to subject both Popish and Protestant Dissenters to her Power and Government, be not the Principle she walks by in her present Aversion.

And to shew you that this is the case, and that her aversion to Popery is a sham to the Liberty desired, the Dissenters are of no use to her, while the penal Laws are on foot; for by them they are put in the power of a Prince of the Religion of the Church she fears, but the moment they are repealed, so far as concerns the preventing Popery to be national, the Dissenters are equally interested with the Church of England against it. But then here is the mischief; This Liberty takes the Rod out of her hand; she can no more whip People into her Churches, and she perhaps may modestly suspect her own vertue and ability to preach them thither.

In short, if she were in earnest against Popery, more then in love with her own Power and Grandeur; that is, if the World were not in the way, she would rejoyce to deliver Men of her own Religion, that are so much more numerous then the Papists,

Papists, that they might ballance against her fears of their prevailing: But to cry she is for Liberty to Protestant Dissenters, and make the demonstration of it, her keeping up the Laws that ruin them, and then say it is for fear of the Religion the Prince owns, and yet force them into his hands by doing so, is, I must confess, something incomprehensible.

Besides, properly and naturally speaking, the Church of England is the People of England, & when its apply'd to a Party, 'tis a Faction to the whole; and that Title has no more Truth in it, then 'tis sense to say the Roman Catholick Church, which in English, is a particular Universal Church: And pray is there no room left to consider this hard case of the Kingdom? I hope the civil Magistrate will, who is the supreme Pastor of this civil Church on Earth. Is she then no more then a Party? no certainly. And how great a one, a true Liberty of Conscience would best tell us, and that is the true reason, and not Popery, that she is tender in the point.

I conclude then, that whilst those of that Religion only desire to be upon the Level with others; I mean upon Native Rights, the Great Charter, what we all of us call our Birth Right, let us not refuse it, lest God suffer them to prevail to correct our partiality. There are Laws enough to punish Offenders against the State, if these were repealed, and not condemn People by Anticipation. That Law which catches a Protestant, will catch a Popish Traytor, Rotor or seditious Person. Again, let us reflect, that we have a Prince of Age, and more honour; the prospect of three excellent Princes of the Protestant Religion, the paucity of the Papists, the number of the Enemies of their Communion, their unity in that aversion: What greater security can we have in the world? Since Policy, Honour, Religion, Number, Unity, Necessity too, conspire to make us safe, for all these are concerned in the means of our preservation; unless our fears and follies should prevail: Which I confess I apprehend most; for they must be deserted of God, that forsake him and themselves too, who dare do a certain evil that a supposed good may come of it, contradict their own Principles, deny what they expect, sow what they would not reap; do to others what they would not that others should do to them: But there is a God in Heaven, and he is just: He will mete to us what we measure to one another, and his Judgment is inevitable: I therefore advise the Church of England to be as ready in her Christian compliances as is possible: First, because it is impious to keep up destroying Laws for Religion, when her Saviour tells her upon this very Question, That he came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them. Secondly, Because by this she will wipe off the Reproach she throws by continuing them, upon her own Apologies for Liberty of Conscience, when under the wheel of Power. Thirdly, Because Liberty to the Papists by Law, is bringing them into the legal interest of the Kingdom, and will prevent the force, they may esse be driven to, by being made and left desperate: For 'tis not to be thought they will willingly pay the reckoning in another Reign, if by any means they can prevent it; and keeping up the penal Laws, can be no security to the Church of England from such Attempts, though they may provoke them upon Her. Fourthly, She hereby saves her Dissenters; and if it be really her inclination to do so, she has no other way, and this unites them to her in affection and in-

terest, if not in Worship. But if on the contrary she persists obstinately to refuse this national Pa-cifick, the Dissenters, I hope, will consider their honest Interest, Conscience and Property, and imbrace those opportunities to secure them, that God in his all-wise providence is pleased to yield them in this conjuncture. Thus Gentlemen, you have my thoughts upon your News, pray communicate them to our acquaintance, and believe that I am, Yours, &c.

POSTSCRIPT.

For the Tests, that are so much discoursed of, I shall only say, that 'tis an other mystery of the times to me, how the Church of England, that was against the Exclusion, can be for them that were design'd for a Pre-amble to it; since in so doing, she is for that which was contrived to introduce the Exclusion she was so zealously against. I confess I never understood her very well, and she grows more and more unintelligible; but this I know, that she must either be sorry for what she has done, or she did not know what she did. The first reflects upon her Loyalty, the last upon her understanding; and because I think that the least, and likeliest evil, I conclude, she is no infallible Guide upon the Question.

Another thing you tell me, that gives great offence, is, His Majesties turning out Protestants, and putting in People of his Religion. This I conceive a fault, that the Church of England is only answerable for. Other Princes have been so unhappy as to Suffer Tests and Marks of Distinction, that have broken and disordered their Kingdoms, by depriving those of their Temporal comforts, that would not receive them; and This people esteemed a mighty grievance; and were frequent and elegant in their complaints about it. We have a King now, that would remove these Marks of Distinction, and secure all men upon their native Right and Birth, That all Parties might sit safely under their own Vine, and under their own Fig-tree; so that now, who is for Liberty? becomes the Test. Are they then fit to be trusted that are out of his Interest, and against the Liberty he is for, and the Nation wants and craves? Or is it good sense, that He (who is mortal as well as other men) should leave the Power in those hands that to his face shew their aversion to the Friends of his Communion, tho he offers to maintain her still? She had the offer to keep them, upon that Principle that must heal and save the Kingdom, Liberty of Conscience; which shews, the King was willing to be served by her sons so chuse, if upon the same National Principles with himself: wherefore 'tis the Gentlemen of the Church of England that turn themselves out of power, rather then extend Liberty of Conscience to others; and shall this Vice be their Vertue? They must be heartily in love with Persecution that can Sacrifice their Places to the upholding of penal Laws for Religion, and rather go out, then let others come in, or so much as live at their own Charges; A fine thing to suffer for. Their Ancestors were Martyrs by penal Laws, but these for them. The cause is chang'd what ever they think, and I am afraid they are chang'd too for want of thinking. I Profess I pity them with all my Heart, and wish them more wit, and better Consciences against next time, if ever they have it; for these, if they will believe me, will hardly ever make so good a Bargain for them, as they have lost by them. More of this, if you like it, next time, and till then, Adieu.

FINIS.